

## **INFORMATION ABOUT HOW TO RECOGNIZE AND HANDLE A SUSPICIOUS PACKAGE OR ENVELOPE**

Letters containing *Bacillus anthracis* (anthrax) have been received by mail in several areas in the United States. In some instances, anthrax exposures have occurred, with several persons becoming infected. To prevent such exposures and subsequent infection, all persons should learn how to recognize a suspicious package or envelope and take appropriate steps to protect themselves and others.

### **Identifying Suspicious Packages and Envelopes**

Some characteristics of suspicious packages and envelopes include the following:

#### **Inappropriate or unusual labeling:**

- Excessive postage
- Handwritten or poorly typed addresses
- Misspellings of common words
- Strange return address or no return address
- Incorrect titles or title without a name
- Not addressed to a specific person
- Marked with restrictions, such as "Personal," "Confidential," or "Do not x-ray"
- Marked with any threatening language
- Postmarked from a city or state that does not match the return address

#### **Appearance**

- Powdery substance felt through or appearing on the package or envelope
- Oily stains, discolorations, or odor
- Lopsided or uneven envelope
- Excessive packaging material such as masking tape, string, etc.

#### **Other suspicious signs**

- Excessive weight
- Ticking sound
- Protruding wires or aluminum foil

If a package or envelope appears suspicious, DO NOT OPEN IT.

### **Handling Suspicious Packages or Envelopes**

1. Do not open any suspicious letter or package and do not touch any suspicious powder or material. Do not shake or empty the contents of any suspicious envelope or package. Do not carry to other areas, show it to

other people, or allow others to examine it.

2. Put the package or envelope down on a stable surface. Do not sniff, touch, taste, or look closely at it or any contents which may have spilled.
3. If the letter or package has already been opened and powder or fluid or other material spills out, do not try to clean up powders or fluids or other materials.
4. Leave the room (or area) and close any doors and keep others away. Alert others in the area about the suspicious package or envelope and take actions to prevent others from entering the area. If possible, shut off the ventilation system.
5. Wash your hands with soap and water to prevent spreading any powder or other material to your face or skin.
6. What to do next...
  - If you are at HOME, report the incident to local police. The local police may notify HAZMAT to evaluate and assess the incident. The local police or HAZMAT will examine the letter, package, or material(s) and determine if an environmental sample of the contents will be forwarded to the New River Health District for biological testing. If needed, environmental samples will be collected for biological testing and the area decontaminated (cleaned-up). **Note: Unopened envelopes or packages will NOT be sent for testing.** A risk assessment for those persons involved in the incident will be coordinated by law enforcement personnel and individuals referred to their primary care physicians as necessary. The local police will also notify the State Police and the FBI if terrorism is suspected.
  - If you are at WORK, report the incident to local police, and notify your building security official or an available supervisor. The local police or HAZMAT will examine the letter, package, or material(s) and determine if an environmental sample of the contents will be forwarded to the New River Health District for biological testing. If needed, environmental samples will be collected for biological testing and the area decontaminated (cleaned-up). **Note: Unopened envelopes or packages will NOT be sent for testing.** A risk assessment for those persons involved in the incident will be coordinated by law enforcement personnel and individuals referred to their primary care physicians as necessary. The local police will also notify the State Police and the FBI if terrorism is suspected.
1. If possible, list all people who were in the room or area when this suspicious letter or package was recognized. Give this list to both the local public health authorities and law enforcement officials for follow-up investigations and advice.
2. Remove any *contaminated* clothing and place in a plastic bag that can be sealed; give the bag to law enforcement personnel. Clothing that is not contaminated does not pose any significant risk, does not need to be discarded, and can be washed in the regular laundry.
3. Shower with soap and water as soon as possible. Do not use bleach or disinfectant on your skin.

4. Biological testing on the collected environmental samples will be done through the State Public Health Laboratory in Richmond, the Division of Consolidated Laboratory Services (DCLS). Depending on the situation and scenario, the environmental sample for biological testing will be delivered EITHER (a) by local law enforcement, via chain of custody, to the New River Health District office in Christiansburg for overnight courier service to DCLS, OR (b) in more emergent, priority situations, via State Police relay to DCLS. Preliminary biologic testing will be done on samples received by DCLS in a priority manner, but usually within approximately 2 days after the sample is received. Confirmatory biologic testing will be completed within approximately 4 days after DCLS receives the specimen.
5. If analysis of the sample yields a positive test for anthrax, the need for prophylaxis and further treatment for those persons exposed (and possibly other persons in the immediate area) will be made by the local health department in consultation with the affected individual(s)' primary care physician(s).

**For all settings and incidents, local law enforcement authorities are the primary contact and will determine the credibility of suspicious letters, packages, and other potential threats.** After being notified of a particular situation, local law enforcement will arrive at the scene, evaluate the situation, and make a determination regarding the credibility of the threat. Local law enforcement may then contact the State Police and/or the FBI.

**New River Health District, November 2, 2001**

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